DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 255 734 CE 041 264

TITLE	Secondary Area Vocational Skills Centers in Washington State: Issues, Trends and Choices for the Future. A Review of Present Status and National Patterns with Alternatives for Policy Decisions.
INSTITUTION	Clark County Vocational Skills Center, Vancouver, WA.; Northwest Regional Educational Lab., Portland, Oreg.
SPONS AGENCY	Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Olympia. Div. of Vocational Education.
PUB DATE	Jan 85
NOTE	68p.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Ancillary School Services; Comparative Analysis; Curriculum Development; Educational Needs; Educational Planning; Educational Policy; *Educational Trends; Financial Support; Futures (of Society); Instructional Development; Needs Assessment; *Policy Formation; Program Administration; Program Implementation; Public Relations; Questionnaires; *Regional Schools; Secondary Education; Staff Development; State of the Art Reviews; State Programs; State Surveys; *Statewide Planning; Trend Analysis; *Vocational Education; *Vocational Schools
IDENTIFIERS	*Washington

ABSTRACT

A study examined national trends and state policy in Washington State pertaining to the administration and funding of area vocational skills centers. During the study, key persons associated with Washington's skills centers were interviewed and surveyed concerning the following areas: policy and planning, curriculum and instruction, student services, staff development, public relations, and financial support. The researchers concluded that with fine-tuning, the existing administrative procedures at Washington's seven vocational skills centers will be even more effective. Unless funding patterns were to change radically, administrative councils composed of participating superintendents should be retained. To maintain local options and flexibility, centers need only general blueprints and technical assistance from the State; each center should be allowed to develop its own policy and procedure. The cooperative factor should be reinstated to allow sending districts to receive reimbursement for ongoing costs incurred by enabling students to attend an area center. State funds should be provided for replacement of equipment separate from funding available for new program start-up. Furthermore, the allowable hours for students attending skills centers should be increased from five to six per day. (Appendixes to this report contain a list of districts participating in skills centers, a list of 1984-1985 skills center offerings, and a summary of the survey findings.) (MN)

ED255734

SECONDARY AREA VOCATIONAL SKILLS CENTERS IN WASHINGTON STATE: ISSUES, TRENDS AND CHOICES FOR THE FUTURE

A Review of Present Status and National Patterns
with Alternatives for Policy Decisions

prepared by
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

for the

Clark County Vocational Skills Center
Vancouver, Washington
Mike Bjur, Director

under a grant provided by

Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Division of Vocational Education

Olympia, Washington

Bruce Brennan, Assistant Superintendent

CE 041264

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

January 1985

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M Rogers

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Reproduced by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, a nonprofit corporation. The work contained herein has been developed pursuant to a grant provided by the Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Division of Vocational Education, Olympia, Washington. The opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and no official endorsement by this agency should be inferred.

Contents

Executive Summary 1
Acknowledgements 5

I. Introduction 6
A. Background of Area Skills Centers Nationally 6
B. Advantages and Disadvantages of Area Vocational Programs . 8
C. Historical Review of Washington's System 11
D. Purpose of this Study 12

II. Policy and Planning 13
A. Essential Features 13
1. The Administrative Council 14
2. Role of the State 15
3. Regional Accreditation and External Reviews 16
B. Options to Consider 16

III. Curriculum and Instruction 17
A. Essential Features 17
1. Determining Program Offerings 17
2. Scheduling Coursework 18
3. Youth Organizations 19
B. Options to Consider 19

IV. Student Services 21
A. Essential Features 21
1. Pupil Support 21
2. Recruitment 22
B. Options to Consider 23

. Providing for Staff 24
A. Essential Features 24
1. Instructional Staff 24
2. Administrative Staff 25
B. Options to Consider 26

VI. Working with Key Publics 27
A. Essential Features 27
1. Relationships with Participating Schools 27
2. Relationships with the Community 28
B. Options to Consider 29

VII. Funding 30
A. Essential Features 30
1. Maintaining Stability of Program 32
2. Financial Incentives for Districts to Participate . . 35
3. Maintaining State-of-the-Art Equipment 35
4. Competing Effectively for Staff 37
5. Transportation 39
B. Options to Consider 39
1. The Current Context 39
2. The Future Context 41

Summary of Options 43

Appendices

A. Participating Districts in Skills Centers 47
B. 1984-85 Skills Center Offerings 49
C. Survey Findings 51

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Area vocational programs at the secondary level are created in recognition of the fact that employability preparation can begin much earlier, especially as technology simplifies work life and schools broaden and diversify basic skills and academic content in earlier grades. Most jobs available today still require less than a baccalaureate degree. Student and parent demand have been critical factors, too. As the 1984 Gallup poll on public attitudes toward education again shows, people want secondary schools to do a better job of preparing students for the work they will do. Other studies show young people as well are more and more concerned about occupational choices and job entry--even those who intend to pursue four-year degree programs and who need a way to pay the bills.

Since 1966, Washington state has been the Pacific Northwest leader in creation of secondary-level area vocational programs serving more than one school district. Washington laws authorize feasibility studies, implementation grants and 90 percent matching funds for construction of joint vocational training facilities. Seven such skills centers have been established to date under this framework: Clark County Vocational Skills Center, Vancouver; Kitsap Peninsula Vocational Skills Center, Bremerton; Occupational Skills Center, Seattle; Sno-Isle Vocational Skills Center, Everett; Spokane Area Vocational Skills Center, Spokane; Tri-City Area Vocational Center, Kennewick, and Yakima Valley Vocational Skills Center, Yakima.

Skills centers in Washington enjoy many strengths:

- Students who are attracted by high interest programs where there is a prime market demand, who want to apply their academic skills in a real world setting
- Administrative councils comprised of member district superintendents who shape policy and procedures
- Active employer committees who help shape program direction and content
- Advisory groups comprised of home high school principals, counselors and other key personnel such as nearby community college representatives
- Scheduling which allows for concentrated timeblocks for theory and practice as well as opportunities for learning leadership and employability skills and attitudes
- Highly qualified staff with considerable work experience in a specialty field who are attracted to teach in a single-purpose institution at a pay scale that recognizes the value of their proven accomplishments in a particular occupational area

While state support has been critical in start-up of these centers, there is little provision for ongoing capital improvements, equipment and material updating, staff development and other large outlays that extend beyond initial center construction and furnishings. Most operational revenues come from participating districts' per-student allocation.

Study Approach

A steering committee comprising area skills center directors provided advice on this study and reviewed the final report. The Clark County Vocational Skills Center was administratively and fiscally responsible for the project, subcontracting with Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) for actual conduct of the work.

Study Findings

Questions which guided this study of national trends and statewide policy and funding questions included:

- Is the present planning and decisionmaking structure working well?

  Key Findings: Based on interviews and a survey of key persons associated with Washington's skills centers, NWREL believes that with fine-tuning, the existing procedures will be even more effective. Unless funding patterns were to radically change, administrative councils comprised of participating superintendents should be retained.

- Are management and personnel policies adequate?

  Key Findings: To maintain local options and flexibility to the greatest extent possible, skills centers only need general blueprints and technical assistance from the state. Each skills center needs its own policy and procedure manual rather than "cut and paste" versions. Local decisions on faculty representation, program offerings and scheduling are still the preferred mode.

- Does the financial structure of skills centers need to be re-examined?

  Key Findings: Given the need to assure more stability in operational funding, to maintain a strong staff, and to assure modern equipment for program offerings, several options are defined in terms of short and longer-term possibilities. Because funding is a major determinant of skills center services, these alternatives are listed below.

Financial Considerations

With the assistance of Mr. Fred Warner, a consultant on Washington school finance associated with Pacific Management Associates in Olympia, options for funding are described using two dimensions--1) changes that can be implemented without wholesale changes in present laws and regulations, and 2) changes that would require entirely new ways of doing business.

Options to Consider in the Current Context

1. Reinstate the interdistrict cooperative factor to allow sending districts to receive reimbursement for ongoing costs incurred by enabling students to attend an area center. Costs for such items as planning time, records maintenance, information sharing, transportation and counseling are increased by participation in skills centers programs. Reimbursement will help participating districts provide support for recruitment, communication and counseling which is needed to maintain enrollment stability and controlled growth. Computed on the basis of 3372 "total enrollment" x .25 weighting factor x 2360 (the average program 00 allocation) times .5 (based on 3 hours in program 00) this would result in an annual cost to the state of $994,740. Total enrollment in this case is derived by using the actual 1983-84 skills center FTE of 1989.48 ÷ .59 (average time spent in skills center programs).

2. Provide state funding for <u>replacement</u> of equipment separate from the funding available for new program start-up. Based on current estimates and a 10-year replacement schedule, the each-year cost to the state would average approximately $35,006 per center for an annual cost of $280,000.

3. Increase the allowable hours for students attending skills centers to six, rather than five per day, and allow the FTEs generated to be claimed either in program 00 (by the sending school) or in program 45 (the skills center) as students actually attend. This would provide more resources to maintain program effort in the sending school without loss to the skills centers. Presently, it is estimated that 85 percent of skills center students actually attend three hours at their home high school and three hours at the center. The estimated cost to the state would be $1,353,000.

4. Place the current funding differential (60/1000) in legislation, rather than leaving it as a regulation only.

5. Provide state funding for a core local skills center staff, independent of FTE-based reimbursements (e.g., two certified staff for the administrative core to include job development and marketing functions and one classified to include records management functions).

Funding: Future Context

1. More adequate funding for vocational education in general and the skills centers in particular to perform an increasingly complex task. Changing the program 30 ratio to 1:16.67 and the skills centers to 1:15 would recognize the reality of higher costs of specialized vocational staff and materials as well as the growing need for curriculum and staff development which will support significantly changed programs.

2. Provide changes in the funding formula to recognize and capitalize on the value of the centers as providers of introductory vocational experiences for a much larger group of students who will attend for shorter than normal time blocks, thus increasing their awareness of emerging employment opportunities, regardless of what academic program they may pursue.

3. As skills centers increase their service and their size, explore funding entirely through a separate line item in legislative appropriations. This would allow the system to expand more quickly and more directly in response to state level demands for specialized programs vital to economic development.

4. Create taxing authority for the joint powers operating an area skills center to provide a minimum tax base for support of basic operations. This would make service more stable over time by providing a "guaranteed base" from which to plan services, thus increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the centers. Another approach would be to encourage local districts to allocate a portion of their levies to the skills center serving their area.

5. Require cooperating districts to guarantee purchase of a predetermined number of student slots each year; the centers to receive the revenue even if "slots" are not fully utilized. This would provide both a more stable base for program planning and an incentive for closer cooperation between the sending school and the skills centers.

6. Allow sending districts and centers alike to claim .75 FTE if a student spends at least half time in their institution. This would provide both centers and sending schools with a more nearly "full" funding for the programs they are actually delivering and provide greater financial incentive to counsel students into the most appropriate setting.

Results of this study will be reported to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction which provided funding for the project.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study of the funding and operation of cooperative occupational programs for high school students was initiated by directors of Washington's seven area vocational skills centers in early 1984. With the guidance and support of Kent Neeley and Roy Schmidt in the Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction in Olympia, Mike Bjur, Director of the Clark County Vocational Skills Center in Vancouver, agreed to facilitate an analysis of patterns and options utilizing technical assistance from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) in Portland, Oregon. All center directors participated in the study's planning and analysis activities.

NWREL tasks included:

- Report current national trends in multi-district cooperative school programs
- Review area vocational/technical school models in selected states
- Analyze existing Washington state codes and regulations impinging upon local agencies and cooperatives
- Summarize existing historical data on Washington skills centers and planning now under way
- Examine financial requirements for present and potential centers
- Recommend alternative statutory, regulatory and local policy options for Washington policymakers and planners to consider

While conducting Laboratory work in other states, Larry McClure, NWREL project coordinator, visited noteworthy secondary vocational skills centers and interviewed other state experts in area vocational programs. He attended several skills center directors meetings to become acquainted with Washington's approaches. Each center director was also personally interviewed. Telephone interviews with representatives using similar models for secondary vocational education were conducted by Judy Bridges of the NWREL staff.

A financial analysis to explore fiscal requirements and funding implications was coordinated by Rex Hagans at NWREL with the assistance of Pacific Management Associates (PMA) in Olympia. The principal contributor from PMA was Fred Warner, a consultant in school finance and business management to Washington public schools. Prior to retirement in 1983, Mr. Warner was assistant superintendent and budget director for Tacoma Public Schools and served as state finance director for the Office of State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

NWREL also gratefully acknowledges the participation of superintendents, principals, coordinators and teachers in the seven skills centers who completed a survey questionnaire. A number of superintendents from districts cooperating in a vocational skills center also met during the October 1984 Washington Association of School Administrators Conference to consider the findings and recommendations contained in this report.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Area Skills Centers Nationally

According to the American Vocational Association, there are approximately 2,000 area vocational-technical schools now operating across the nation. However, in the Pacific Northwest the design and operation of these unique kinds of institutions--designed to address occupational exploration and preparation needs of high school students in particular--has been largely confined to the state of Washington.

The prevailing rationale for skills centers is based on common sense: taxpayers can get more payoff and employers will be assured of a better-prepared worker if high-cost, lower-enrollment vocational programs are concentrated in one location. Area vocational programs at the secondary school level are a relatively recent phenomenon nationally. First cousins are public two-year postsecondary institutions such as community or junior colleges which are now a well-entrenched part of the educational scene. Their primary mission is to serve adults, however.

Area vocational programs at the secondary level were created in recognition of the fact that job-specific preparation can begin much earlier in many occupational areas, especially as technology simplifies work life and schools broaden and diversify basic skills and academic content in earlier grades. Most jobs available today still require less than a baccalaureate degree. Student and parent demand have been critical factors, too. As the 1984 Gallup poll on public attitudes toward education again shows, people want the schools to do a better job of preparing students for the work they will do. Other studies show young people, as well, are more and more concerned about occupational choices and job entry--even those who intend to pursue four-year degree programs.

Washington state provides the only Pacific Northwest example of a multi-district cooperative model with students sharing time between their home high schools and an area skills center. Other state models that were examined in this study included California, Colorado, Illinois, North Dakota, New York, Michigan, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Utah. Definitions of the elements and other distinguishing characteristics of area vocational centers reviewed by NWREL follow.

High school vocational students attending area skills centers are typically junior and senior level youth who have completed many of the standard high school prerequisites and choose to explore occupational areas of interest OR concentrate in a specific occupational sequence. Vocational students typically seek and enjoy opportunities to apply what they learn (theory) in real-life situations (practice). Recent studies show that just as many vocational students will pursue two- and four-year postsecondary programs as will so-called general and academic students who choose other options. Vocational students (both those who concentrate and those who are trying out potential lifelong job skills) will frequently participate in a special-focus student leadership organization that broadens occupational skills, often requiring out-of-school time for projects and competitions. Many vocational students will also have a chance to participate in related work experience or on-the-job training under the supervision of school staff.

Adult students may enroll in area vocational school programs in many parts of the nation. In these situations, there may be two options: 1) adults will attend skills center classes in the evening or separately from high school youth, following the rationale that differences in maturity, interpersonal skills and learning styles require somewhat different instructional strategies, or 2) adults and youth enroll in the same classes with cross-age peer assistance utilized as a valuable instructional technique. The seven Washington area skills centers do not serve adults in the regular day programs.

Full-day programs are those where a student cuts most ties with a home high school (though a diploma may still be granted) and spends the entire school day at the area center. These models will typically offer certain mandated high school classes such as English, social studies and math so students can complete graduation requirements. The major disadvantages, according to some observers, is a homogeneous population that becomes labeled, thus perpetuating the invisible barrier between the liberal arts and sciences and the practical arts and technical content areas. None of the present Washington skills centers offer students a full-day program.

Part-day programs are more typical and involve students enrolling in their home high school for academic and elective courses and extracurricular activities and traveling to another location for specialized training. The time spent at the center would normally be 1-4 hours depending on course offerings and laboratory/work experience situations. Most vocational sequences in Washington skills centers cover 2-3 hours or class periods daily.

The predominant model for housing the program is to construct a central facility near the travel hub of the area to be served. Some have remodeled existing schools while others look for locations next to business parks or commercial areas. A less-used but effective alternative is to locate programs 1) at existing high schools, where strong faculty and adequate facilities/equipment are already in place, and transport students from other schools there; 2) in actual employment sites where faculty can call upon working experts as resources (e.g., health occupations classes in a community medical clinic or hospital complex); or 3) sharing facilities with a community college.

Governance of area vocational programs or skills centers will be greatly influenced by the next distinguishing characteristic: whether the center serves only one district or several. The single district model is usually found in large school systems where several high schools generate enough students seeking special options to create a comprehensive skills center in a convenient location.

With one school board and administration overseeing the center, in hope of making policymaking and budgeting less complicated, the single district model experiences the same kind of challenges that interdistrict centers must address--primarily, high schools not excited about losing FTEs to another building. The majority of skills centers now under way nationally, however, are multi-district cooperatives, either operating under joint-powers agreements or through some kind of intermediate unit or separate taxing authority.

B. Advantages and Disadvantages of Area Vocational Programs

There are at least ten good reasons why the operation of secondary-level area skills centers as an extension of vocational offerings at home high schools is so popular today around the country:

1. Highly qualified staff with considerable work experience in a specialty field can be attracted to teach in a single-purpose institution (no pep rallies to attend!) and generally at a pay scale that recognizes the value of their expertise in a particular occupational area.

2. Student enrollment can be concentrated to offer programs that individual schools would have difficulty justifying, but where student interest and market demand suggest the offering would pay off if enough students knew about the opportunity.

3. Expensive equipment can be concentrated in one location and become available to more students, a crucial cost-impact question in many technology-dependent occupational fields.

4. Small schools and districts can expand their curricular offerings impressively without significantly adding to their budgets.

5. More concentrated blending of theory and practice can be offered via longer time blocks. In most cases, students use instructional time to the maximum. Staff, unlike most in public schools, typically have only one subject area preparation daily. There may be more flexibility, too, by extending the school day into early morning, late afternoon and evening, and by operating summer sessions.

6. Full-time, qualified leadership can be provided to coordinate the program and continually monitor the various community relationships, district ties, state/federal grant requirements, staff development concerns, and other complex administrative requirements. Many skills center directors function as, and are certified as, school administrators. "Home" high school principals, in turn, do not have to be concerned about the supervision of area skills center faculty located off their campus but still serving their students.

7. Students must choose to attend a skills center and if performance is not up to standards they can just as easily be sent back to regular school programs, depending on Center policies. In most cases, the student maintains a continuing tie to the home high school, receiving a diploma when all graduation requirements are met.

8. Student leadership skills provided by vocational youth organizations can be blended naturally into daily activities and provide the kind of employability preparation many employers and parents often applaud the most: initiative, responsibility, poise, ability to work with others, writing for a purpose, speaking to a group, expecting to win, knowing how a business works.

9. Highly visible community institutions with an identified purpose are created which students, employers, unions, taxpayers, parents, school board members--just about anybody--can point to with pride and say "that's our skills center" since there is a way for all to participate. Assistance in planning, donation of equipment, purchase of services or products, cost-effective delivery of services, assisting as a community resource person, helping open up more options for youth in the future are reasons for strong community support.

10. Programs can usually be implemented quickly in response to labor market demand, thanks in part to flexibility in state vocational planning procedures.

There are also drawbacks and questions that surround skills centers nationally and that merit consideration:

1. In Washington, and perhaps in states we did not survey, sending school districts (schools) often lose part of the state (or local) reimbursement for the portion of the school day their students are attending the Center. This tends to be a disincentive for home school principals to recruit students actively for center courses.

2. Time pressures on students are forcing young people to eliminate some elective offerings such as vocational education in order to meet increased academic requirements for graduation. Some skills centers across the nation report an enrollment decline except where home districts have moved to increase the number of class periods or where the skills center program staff, facility and reputation are particularly strong.

3. Home high school administrators, counselors and teachers feel less "ownership" of a program located off their campus. What's "out of sight" is "out of mind."

4. Students choose to attend a vocational skills center and in so doing often make some sacrifices their peers may not, depending on Center policies, such as early or late schedules, loss of some vacation days, loss of lunch time for travel, no time for certain electives and difficulty in participating in extracurricular activities.

5. Travel time to and from the student's home high school can sometimes be extensive, particularly in rural areas. Cost of transportation is sometimes an issue, as well.

6. High costs to build, equip and maintain a modern skills training center may make some taxpayers wince.

7. Staff professional development costs are often higher because instructors often come from the private sector and may require and seek more inservice assistance as they teach their specialties. This is an essential budget item.

8. Costs for operating vocational programs become much more visible, making it easier for budget cutters to zero in on a free-standing program.

9. Students become labeled or sterectyped as people who work with their hands and not with their heads, or as somehow lesser in ability or potential, even though they choose to prepare for fields at the skills center where placement is highly likely and pay can be quite impressive.

10. Academic and vocational subject matter tend to become even more isolated and students are frequently unable to find time for "broadening experiences" in the liberal arts.

C. Historical Review of Washington's System

The concept of an area vocational skills center to serve high school youth in Washington state was initiated in 1966 when Highline Public Schools, South Central Public Schools and Federal Way Public Schools entered into an interdistrict cooperative agreement to build and operate the Occupational Skills Center located not far from Sea-Tac Airport. Subsequently, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Frank B. Brouillet encouraged other areas of the state to consider formation of centers in their jurisdictions:

Initial School Year	Center Name	Location	Host District
1966-67	Occupational Skills Center	Seattle	Highline
1976-77	Yakima Valley Vocational Skills Center	Yakima	Yakima
1977-78	Sno-Isle Vocational Skills Center	Everett	Mukilteo
1977-78	Kitsap Peninsula Vocational Skills Ctr	Bremerton	Bremerton
1980-81	Tri-City Area Vocational Center	Kennewick	Kennewick
1982-83	Spokane Area Vocational Skills Center	Spokane	Spokane
1983-84	Clark County Vocational Skills Center	Vancouver	Evergreen
1985-86	Greater Olympia area center (projected)	Tumwater	Tumwater

A complete listing of skills center participating districts can be found in Appendix A.

Operating Patterns

Each skills center in Washington state has its own unique history and operating framework. Several factors contribute to this:

1. The State Superintendent of Public Instruction does not dictate strict guidelines to be followed except as provided by the state plan for vocational education and legislatively-mandated funding patterns.

2. Each local area had the freedom to develop its own service delivery approach and policy structure using feasibility and start-up funds provided by the state.

3. As a result, each set of organizing superintendents has shaped programs that best fit the needs of students in their particular area.

D. Purpose of This Study

A study at this juncture is important to the long-range strength of secondary area vocational skills centers for several reasons:

- The seven present campuses (with the eighth in Thurston County scheduled to open in 1985-86) have now reached a level of maturity. The Seattle (Highline) center, in fact, initiated plans in early 1984 to update and expand existing facilities while the other six anticipate the need to update equipment and adjust programs.

- There is more recognition now that skills centers are producing excellent graduates who are performing exceedingly well both in the marketplace and in postsecondary education and training programs.

- School leaders in unserved areas of the state are inquiring more frequently about their options for creating new skills centers.

- Calls for reform in vocational education typically cite area programs as a model for the future, particularly because of the flexibility such cooperatives offer in starting new training programs based on local needs or closing down unnecessary ones that are no longer viable.

The distinguishing features of Washington skills centers will be summarized in the sections that follow, including how other states approach each issue, with possible options for Washington policymakers to consider in future planning.

II. POLICY AND PLANNING

A. Essential Features

The Washington approach to area vocational skills centers is defined primarily by tradition. Few state regulations address skills centers specifically, leaving interagency agreements to create each center. Each has chosen to utilize an administrative council, comprised of the participating school district superintendents (or their representatives), to provide center oversight.

In the Spokane center, for example, the superintendent and vocational director from each participating district both sit on the council. At the Kitsap center, a community college and education service district representative are non-voting observers. Since the creation of the Yakima Center in 1976-77, there have been 31 different superintendents sitting on the council. Each change, of course, requires a period of orientation for the incoming council member.

The level of involvement by each council, and the nature and extent of involvement with other important players such as principals and counselors, seems to vary with each consortium and its director. Some have chosen to appoint a steering committee or center advisory council comprised of representative school board members, principals, counselors, teachers, business-industry-labor representatives and, in some cases, representatives from local postsecondary institutions, state legislators and a local labor market economist. Each occupational area in the centers is also required by state/federal guidelines to utilize a vocational program (e.g., craft) advisory committee.

The formal process for creating a skills center begins with a ten-year interagency agreement that spells out the relationships between the host district (determined by the final physical placement of the center) and the participating districts. The elements of the agreement include such issues as:

1. Needs for and purposes of an area center
2. Effective date of agreement
3. Administrative responsibility, usually spelling out the host district's authority for the director (manager) and staff and defining the council's role
4. Determination of policies to guide operation of the center (usually the host district's policies are followed)
5. Program scope, defining priority of secondary vocational education and providing for ancillary services such as counseling
6. Budget process
7. Proration of unfunded costs
8. Building use policies
9. Procedures for inventory of equipment
10. Student eligibility and retention emphasizing home district's responsibility in decisionmaking
11. Transfer of property

12. Procedures for dissolution or withdrawal of a district no longer wishing to participate (Dissolution can occur only after a ten-year period, with State Board approval)
13. Procedures for admitting new districts
14. Location of center and any satellite programs
15. Capital investment, including initial fair share based on 11th and 12th grade enrollments
16. Policy on receiving gifts

Most of the existing centers review the interagency agreement annually with each participating school board. In most cases, this is a very perfunctory action that results in an addendum sheet attached to the original organizing agreement spelling out the coming year's anticipated allocations of guaranteed student slots. While some directors have questioned the time and effort to secure each local board's annual ratification of the legal framework, centers with five or fewer districts have had no particular concern in this area. Indeed, some directors admit the value of reviewing the center's activities and plans with each school board yearly. In some cases, this annual process addresses such factors as an inventory of assets, projected budget and similar fiscal and programmatic concerns.

From time to time, according to some center directors, one of the original "co-signers" will question their district's involvement. While each interagency agreement has a procedure for districts that choose to withdraw, none has chosen that option in any skills center. On the other hand, several districts have joined existing consortia. Negotiations often take more than a year. For some, final deals have sometimes been quite close, but not consummated. The eventual solution for these tends to be a tuition arrangement rather than partial "ownership." "Buying in" requires a fair share of the assessment valuation of the center, which must be entered into the requesting district's own capital improvement levy and successfully passed by the local taxpayers.

1. The Administrative Council

One of the biggest challenges facing a center director is maintaining a close working relationship with the council. Each council for a Washington skills center meets monthly, quarterly or as needed at the instigation of the center director. Since the group serves almost like a school board, similar needs emerge:

- o defining the role of the council vs. the role of the host superintendent and participating superintendents
- o orientating new members when a change occurs
- o building trust among administrators who naturally share a competitive edge
- o reinforcing a common purpose in an atmosphere of large vs. small district issues
- o using peer pressure to influence those members "whose demands get out of hand"
- o handling absences of members who miss meetings because "they're comfortable with what's happening"

There is no single typical pattern of council operation:

- o one center holds meetings at the center itself and concentrates on monthly program reports
- o several councils rotate the chairperson responsibility while others assign that role to the host superintendent
- o one council sits in a circle with no chairperson to emphasize the co-equal status of all members
- o councils write very few policies and procedures expressly for skills centers; host district guidelines are used as a second-best fallback
- o frequently a smaller executive committee is established which the director can use as a sounding board
- o subcommittees are created to address key topics such as bargaining with employers or development of the annual operating budget

Issues which have sparked some of the biggest concerns on various Washington state administrative councils over the years have included:

- o grading policies
- o administrative salaries
- o indirect charges by host district
- o bookkeeping practices
- o scheduling the school day and year

In states where the local taxes are levied to help support the program, the policymaking body for the center frequently is drawn from the elected school boards of the partcipating districts and includes other city or county officials. If the center is operated by an intermediate educational services agency, that agency's policy structure is applied. A third approach is to draw upon one or more school district-appointed representatives from each participating district to oversee center operations.

2. Role of the State

Washington's authority for secondary vocational programs operation is vested in the Superintendent of Public Instruction while state-level specialists provide a variety of technical assistance services. The climate for skills centers has been very supportive, due in large measure to the examples provided by existing vocational-technical institutes (serving both youth and adults) and the nearly 20-year success story at [illegible]line. Many responding in this study, however, tend to favor increased technical assistance--particularly for districts engaged in feasibility and planning activities for new centers. Center directors are now required to "beg, borrow and steal" and often wonder if they're re-inventing the wheel when setting up a new program. Even experienced directors still have not had time to pull together Center-specific policies and procedures but have tried to make host district policy manuals fit. Monthly half-day meetings of directors are helpful in sharing what each center is doing, but the time is often limited. At the staff level, efforts to implement job-alike (peer interaction) activities have been frustrated by travel costs or inadequate funds to cover release time or classroom substitute pay.

A related issue that is being addressed by some centers is articulation with postsecondary agencies. Here again, the state can encourage joint planning in specific program areas, perhaps allowing students to complete prerequisites at the skills center and move to advanced standing at a nearby community college such as is being done at the Yakima center.

In states where there is centralized coordination and funding, the state issues strict guidelines and closely monitors programs. A state can also promote articulation of educational services in such innovations as "two-plus-two" models, where skills centers and postsecondary agencies build a closely coordinated curriculum for students. External agencies such as regional accrediting organizations also exert influence. The most frequently cited is the North Central Association of Schools and Colleges.

3. Regional Accreditation and External Reviews

Based on other states' experience and interest expressed in our interviews, Washington skills centers may want to encourage participating districts to include the center in any external assessment of high school programs by regional and/or state evaluation teams. Since skills centers serve as an extension of the high school program, visitors should pay close attention to the services being provided through cooperative agreements.

B. Options to Consider

1. Develop a common guidebook for skills center directors and administrative councils, including but not limited to:

   a. Suggested policies and procedures (e.g., grading policies)
   b. Relevant state statutes and regulations
   c. Sample interdistrict agreements
   d. Suggested standards
   e. Suggested common data base system.

2. Give the administrative council's role greater emphasis as the center's policymaking body. Rotate the chair's responsibility among member districts annually to give participating superintendents closer familiarity with center operations.

3. Suggest that the center director be invited to attend participating district management team meetings.

4. Expand state technical assistance services to include support in information sharing, maintaining information bases, and arranging statewide skills center staff "networking" opportunities.

5. Encourage administrative councils to include skills centers in the accreditation self-study of participating high schools, perhaps using a simple checklist which would not bog down each center in additional paperwork or staff time.

III. CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

A. Essential Features

The instructional program at each area skills center in Washington state is left to the discretion of each center's administrative council and director. When a center is initially constructed, the state will match 90 percent of the costs for five approved vocational programs. Staff, of course, must be certified by the state to teach; but beyond these guidelines, issues such as curriculum, scheduling, staff development, and youth organizations are local decisions. In 1983, the state encouraged skills centers to initiate a summer school program which approximately doubled in size in 1984. While there have been some new issues to be addressed by summer school (e.g., limited hours available, reluctance of staff to teach year around), center directors have been pleased by the result.

1. Determining Program Offerings

The NWREL written survey of superintendents, principals, counselors and teachers points to three criteria that stand out when administrative councils recommend program additions or deletions: (1) local and state labor market demand, (2) student interest (determined, for example, through surveys in participating high schools) and (3) advisory committee recommendations. The range of 1983-84 offerings is noted in Appendix B.

Skills center directors report the following factors are also important in their advocacy of a new program or changes in existing ones: degree of community-generated support, likelihood of students getting jobs, local superintendents' approval, availability of facilities, ability to meet industrial standards. Some directors report that it sometimes takes as long as a year to put certain programs in effect if the offering is "politically sensitive." This issue may arise if one participating high school already has a similar program. In one or two cases, centers have never implemented programs that were originally planned because of such local political questions.

Examples of programs that centers have added recently in response to the above factors include computer technology (installation, operation), warehouse and inventory control, fluid power, fashion merchandising and medical-clerical.

Examples of programs never implemented or dropped for various reasons after initial planning include custodian training, commercial sewing, engineering aide, data entry, landscaping, and reprographics.

Programs in some centers that were changed radically or that tend to "come and go" depending on student enrollment and staffing include carpentry, automated office systems, nursing, landscaping, and health occupations.

According to the national survey of vocational skills centers sponsored in 1984 by the American Vocational Association, business education and trades/industries are the most commonly offered programs. Most schools have at least four programs, a pattern that also holds true in Washington. Health-related occupations is a popular program nationally, followed by home economics, agriculture and distributive education-oriented programs. The latter programs are typically found in home high schools as well.

Advisory committees for each occupational area tend to be a universal feature both nationally and locally. Washington skills centers rely heavily on these committees both for planning and program review (what competencies should be taught). Donations of equipment and assistance with student placement are also important roles. Highline reported an interesting process which led to its computer technology program. Local experts were called together and asked: "Can you train high school youth in computer installation?" Representatives from Safeco Insurance, Boeing and several other large and small firms said "Why not?" and agreed to write the curriculum, prepare specifications for equipment, evaluate the bids, write a teacher job description, participate in interviews and monitor program progress. In other cases, such as Yakima, there has been deliberate articulation with the nearby community college to make sure the skills learned at the center feed directly into postsecondary sequences.

Most centers also utilize a larger general advisory council, comprised of local labor and industry representatives, administrators, counselors, and other key leaders, which reviews program offerings and makes recommendations to the administrative council.

2. Scheduling Coursework

Because skills centers operate as extensions of the participating high schools, the home school daily schedules must be accommodated. In one instance, a skills center director must work with 23 different schedules in eight high schools to develop a timetable that is appropriate for the majority of students coming to the center. In another case, cooperating school districts jointly coordinate schedules for school holidays, even if exact starting and staffing times must depend on transportation requirements.

In these cases, strong administrative councils or a facilitative external agency (such as an area education service district) are helpful in reaching agreements among superintendents. Typically, there is enough peer "pressure" among participating superintendents that timing issues are resolved.

Skills center staff must also be flexible, however, since not all students are able to arrive and leave at the same time. At Sno-Isle, for example, some students ride buses for over an hour to reach the same classes attended by students who come much shorter distances. In another case, a study of schedules found that some students could miss as many as five weeks of school if a master schedule were not completed to resolve scheduling conflicts.

Other problems arise when the center is in session while the home high school is not. In most instances, students continue to be responsible for classes and continue to attend, an impressive measure of the commitment these youth typically make. In cases where the home school is not in session, some districts continue to operate transportation for center students.

The ideal situation would be if the center were to set the schedule and the participating schools accommodate it. The issue of scheduling student classes is perhaps the toughest instructional problem skills center directors face. Several councils and directors have taken the stance that, because skills centers are unique institutions serving unique students, participating students should be allowed, for example, to register for fall classes in the spring before their other classes are set. This helps assure students they will be able to obtain the programs they seek, hopefully providing for other school prerequisites to be scheduled around the center schedule.

Some school districts apparently allow their students to attend the center only in either the morning or the afternoon, a practice which presents other difficulties for center directors (e.g., class load "leveling"). Interestingly enough, some superintendents use the center schedule as leverage in bargaining with their regular staff. Another noteworthy difference between school and center attendance policies appears in situations where students can lose an entire credit at the center if they have more than five or six days of unexcused absences. These are tougher standards than many high schools require.

3. Youth Organizations

The development of leadership skills is an important part of secondary vocational programs and several skills centers in Washington state place strong emphasis on this aspect of the curriculum. Considerable research exists to support the fact that employers value the kind of skills that groups such as Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), Vocational Industrial Clubs of America (VICA), Office Education Association (OEA), and others promote: responsibility, initiative, competition, public speaking, business concepts, etc. The extended time blocks at skills centers allow staff to infuse student leadership activities into instruction. In some cases the center may operate its own youth organization chapters, but if the home high school also has a chapter, center students represent their own district.

At least one skills center operates its own Associated Student Body organization with elected officers from both morning and afternoon sessions of classes, who then meet monthly.

B. Options to Consider

1. Continue summer school option for skills centers, emphasizing its value as an extension of the nine-month program, its value as a student initial training experience and its potential for providing short-term training.

2. Consider the addition of academic skills staff at skills centers as a mechanism for strengthening the tie between vocational subject matter and basic skills. Academic staff can also provide valuable help in remediation and tutoring.

3. Review the possibilities of utilizing skills centers for other specialty programs with limited enrollments but with obvious occupational merit (foreign languages, advanced mathematics, advanced science).

4. Implement a more flexible student day through earlier morning and later afternoon classes to accommodate tight student schedules. Make sure center offerings are clearly listed in participating high schools' master schedules and catalogs.

5. Maintain the three-hour-block timeframes for most students, but continue working to change curricula so that equivalent academic credit might be available in those programs where rigorous content has been identified by joint academic/vocational committees.

6. Emphasize the importance of student leadership opportunities in long-range local center planning and in annual staff performance reviews.

IV. STUDENT SERVICES

A. Essential Features

The provision of pupil personnel services for skills centers students is primarily viewed as a home high school responsibility, with only minimum administrative services maintained at the center facility. Nationwide, most states provide for guidance, counseling and placement at area centers. Only one center in the study provides an approved lunch program. In some instances, special personnel to work with the handicapped are provided. Library services are typically focused on occupationally-specific material and media program areas. Psychological and social work services, and the assistance of a school nurse, are examples of support that must extend from the home school.

1. Pupil Support

In Washington, all centers but one have multiple professional staff to serve the two "waves" of students that attend each campus daily. This staffing mix typically changes during the summer session, however, with fewer students in attendance. During the regular year, the director is usually supported by one or more counselors whose primary attention is directed to student scheduling and liaison with home high schools. In one case, the center designates discipline as the prime responsibility of the second professional.

Response to the mail survey to skills center constituents shows very high support for occupational information, job placement services and personal counseling as important ancillary services for center students. Special education and library services were also highly supported.

In those few instances where special education students attend a center, it has generally been possible to locate either special project funds or rely on districts to provide aides or money for special staff. The Kitsap center tries to allocate 14 percent of its slots for special education students and seeks to draw on special education funds for that professional support. Sno-Isle at one time had a special education grant to provide tutorial support in basic skills for special education students. English as a Second Language funds were also utilized in a special project at Sno-Isle one year.

Tri-City tests all students' basic skills levels within 15 days after classes have begun. Results will typically identify 20 percent of students as not being able to succeed and about 3-4 students yearly who are diagnosed as handicapped for the first time. In these instances, the help of the home high school is enlisted.

Tri-City is the only center in the study which is visited on a weekly half-day basis by a school nurse, though the centers with health occupations programs have daily access to health care professionals.

In the area of student job placement, the Sno-Isle Center has an Employment Service counselor housed at the center to serve the community as well. Another center features a bulletin board updated weekly by the Employment Service. Otherwise, individual teachers handle job placement requests.

2. Recruitment

The liaison role that student services personnel provide for a center is essential. In most Washington centers, these personnel have counseling responsibilities and become critical links to counselors in the home high schools.

Much of the time that directors and counselors spend with participating schools is in the area of recruitment and orientation of potential students. Techniques employed are many, as noted by Spokane director Ruth Abendroth in a report to her council in the spring of 1984. Based on a survey of student views on effective outreach methods, the techniques, from most to least effective, were:

- friends
- other students
- tours
- counselors
- home high school teachers
- video tape
- reputation
- brochures
- class meetings at home high school
- slides
- open house
- parents
- newsletters

Other techniques used in Spokane, including school newspaper stories, lunches at the center, public service spots and talks at home high schools, were not judged to be very effective recruiting techniques.

Superintendents responding to the survey had several thoughts on this issue:

- more communication with principals and staff, particularly counselors and vocational staff
- add more counseling personnel at center
- visitation of home high schools by center staff
- tours of center by 9th grade classes
- involve center students in promoting their programs at home high schools
- provide displays of center accomplishments in home schools
- professional interaction between home school staff and center staff

Center directors reported a variety of successful techniques used to recruit students and maintain strong relationships with home schools. Primary among them is the use of advisory committees (counselors, principals, teachers) that help members become aware of the center's programs.

B. Options to Consider

1. Pursue state support for essential core student services staff to provide counseling and recordkeeping assistance, job placement networking, and outreach to local employers.

2. Provide for a more visible transition process for skills center "completers," including an exit interview and a career portfolio that includes a completed resume.

3. Expand services to special populations by utilizing Individualized Education Plan (IEP) resources through participating high schools.

V. PROVIDING FOR STAFF

A. Essential Features

1. Instructional Staff

Center directors in Washington typically hire their staff directly, following host district procedures. Several centers use an interview team (often including advisory committee members, a counselor, and sometimes a present or former student) which follows criteria and a job description previously approved by the administrative council.

Hiring experienced persons from business and industry is a real benefit in skills centers, but also presents some special challenges in staff development. Center instructors bring a wealth of work experience and interpersonal skills but little or no background in such areas as curriculum development. It is this area where Washington skills center directors devote considerable inservice training resources, sometimes even providing more professional staff development days than regular secondary school faculty receive.

In the states where skills centers are organized much like a school district, the director or superintendent is a certified administrator with salary and benefits established by the board. Center superintendents and sending school superintendents appear to be considered equals, yet the amount of cooperation and communication between a center and its sending schools seems to vary from state to state and even within states. In New York, where BOCES (Boards of Cooperative Education Services) operate 43 area skills centers, the superintendent is a field officer for the state department.

The majority of centers in other states have their own staffing policies and procedures. Staff are certified with either a standard or provisional teaching certificate. Generally, those with a provisional certificate are required to complete education courses to become certified. In most cases, staff hired without teaching credentials are given credit for their work experience through formulas to equate work experience with teaching experience. In some cases it's a one-to-one ratio and in others there are formulas which state "(A number) of hours of work experience equal (a number) of years of teaching experience." In some cases where specialized staff are needed, they are paid more than teachers with the same amount of experience. In Minnesota, this system appears to work well. The American Federation of Teachers is the bargaining unit and, because they are affiliated with the AFL/CIO, they understand the business/labor perspective of a skills center. In Illinois, on the other hand, there appear to have been some problems in negotiations with teacher groups.

In New York, there is a new 1984 regulation requiring all staff to complete a one day inservice annually. Costs are included in the BOCES budgets. Minnesota, Illinois and Oklahoma are requiring staff development or quality assistance plans. In Illinois, the state is planning to pay more of the staff development costs and to reimburse districts. California provides once-a-year inservice for all staff, coordinated statewide. In Colorado, instructors hired without teaching qualifications are provided basic courses in how to

teach. There is also an annual summer conference for professional education. Michigan provides an extensive program through a grant with Michigan State University for skill updating, with inservice sessions running all year at no charge to the centers. Tennessee requires 40 hours of training at the expense of the staff member. In Minnesota, staff development is required and the one center we surveyed works closely with the community college. In addition, there are industrial leaves available allowing up to three months away with pay for skill update. The Center also provides for national travel if necessary.

2. Administrative Staff

While all center directors in Washington have strong credentials as vocational educators, several are also certified as principals--a vitally important issue, said one, because directors must evaluate teachers and operate several-hundred-thousand-dollar programs. However, the role of the director is perceived in various ways by the host district and/or administrative councils at different locations.

In some instances the director sits in on regular administrative cabinet meetings of the host district; in others, the director meets regularly with secondary principals alone. In some districts, the director may be "down the chain" with little direct access to top policymakers. On the other hand, one director was elected president of the local principals' association. In terms of placement on a salary scale, the pattern seems to be that directors are paid an equivalent amount to secondary principals. In one case, however, the pay for the center director was a major issue of debate in an administrative council.

Whether the center is viewed as an extension of its host district vs. being a separate entity tends to dictate how staff bargaining is handled. Sno-Isle and Kitsap tend to operate as separate organizations and, based on certification hearings conducted by the Public Employee Relations Committee (PERC), nonsupervisory staff in those centers are represented by independent bargaining units. A 1984 PERC ruling on Tri-City found that the Kennewick District as host had a long prior history of handling personnel matters for the center and that the Kennewick Education Association should continue to represent professional staff there. Director Bob McLaughlin noted "There is strength in numbers" when skills center staff can team up with the larger district-wide association. In the Spokane center, staff are not represented by any formal unit at all, at their own request. However, a Faculty Involvement Group meets every two weeks. Classified employees typically choose to be part of the host district's bargaining unit. This is the pattern followed in the majority of centers. At Highline and Yakima Valley, skills center instructors are placed on a separate vocational salary schedule with a 1:1 equivalency of industry experience to teaching experience. Director Hugh Albrecht would like, however, to be able to place skills center staff higher in a salary bracket initially but have them eventually "top out" at the same rate as masters degree teachers.

Setting personnel policies has also been a hit-and-miss affair. Most centers adopt the host district's policies or, as at Sno-Isle, have modified a vocational-technical institute's set.

An interesting variation that typifies at least two Washington skills centers and a number of others across the country is the coordination of vocational programs among several districts, using the skills center as a kind of catalyst. At Tri-City, the Kennewick School District has historically coordinated or supervised vocational programming across the six districts now in the center consortium. The center director, in fact, reports to an area vocational programs coordinator. At Yakima Valley, on the other hand, the center assistant director also coordinates vocational progress for several "upper valley" districts on a half-time basis. When the center administrative councils for these two centers meet, they also devote part of their time to area-wide vocational education matters.

B. Options to Consider

1. Encourage skills center staff to take leaves of absences for skills update experiences (internships) in business and industry as part of an approved professional development plan.

2. Conduct annual statewide survey of skills center staff development needs.

3. Provide additional opportunities for group staff development before each school year begins.

4. Review current Legislative Evaluation Appraisal Program (LEAP) schedule and placement of private sector-qualified instructors to determine if this schedule accommodates competitive salaries for specialized personnel from business and industry.

5. Encourage participating districts to include the center directors in regular and/or special management team planning sessions.

6. Recommend future skills center directors to obtain vocational administrative and administrative certification as principals in recognition of their management of complex organizations.

VI. WORKING WITH KEY PUBLICS

A. Essential Features

While many skills center campuses and facilities around the nation are impressive, as in any educational or business enterprise it will be the people and their communication networks that make the program work. Because an area program depends so much on complex relationships among several districts and several distinctive communities, an area skills center director must become a skilled communicator, if not a politician. Many hours will be spent in meetings, on the phone and making presentations to keep various individuals and interest groups informed of center needs, plans and activities. Among these constituencies are:

- o Students (both present and future)
- o Parents
- o Participating district superintendents
- o Participating district principals
- o Participating counselors
- o Participating faculty
- o Local and regional employers
- o Organized labor
- o Postsecondary training institutions
- o Graduates

1. Relationships with Participating Schools

Survey results indicate that present skills centers are doing a good job communicating with key publics but that there is a continuing need to improve. The mailed survey indicates that students do feel the center is an integral part of their home high school, while the home high school staff may need more information. Coordination and communication with existing vocational and academic programs is a continuing challenge. Articulation with postsecondary institutions is weak in some cases.

There is a strong feeling among all respondents that skills centers provide more options for students, despite the fact that home high schools will likely lose enrollment to the centers and that there will be fewer vocational choices for youth in their regular high schools.

Respondents fear that, even though many would like to attend, high-achieving students are not selecting center offerings because of increased high school graduation requirements. Half of all respondents feel time pressure due to these new standards.

On the other hand, respondents see a brighter future for skills centers in the next decade. While most believe skills center enrollment will stabilize or slightly decline over the next two years, they predict a steady increase over the ensuing 3-10 year period.

One of the positive influences on enrollment for most respondents has been the summer school option that was available in 1983 and 1984. Other modifications in scheduling arrangements that should be examined include extending the program day (early morning and late afternoon classes), enrolling students alternately full time for semesters at the center and at the home high school, or breaking the home high school schedule into 7 or 8 one-period blocks to allow students to take more classes

Center directors report they spend many hours every week on public relations tasks. In one case, for example, the director drops in monthly on every high school principal in the consortium just to chat. In addition, directors serve on committees of all types, which require both day and nighttime meetings. Some rely heavily on regular meetings with principals and counselors, particularly as a way to resolve potential scheduling conflicts, such as standardized testing schedules at a home high school or grading policies.

One of the challenges a skills center director must always face is the question of vocational faculty or administrators in a school where the district chooses to operate a program also offered at the skills center. While many districts have shut down outdated programs and are pleased to let the center run a single quality program, in one example a student had to write a 30-page justification before being released to attend the skills center's program rather than enrolling in his home school's less comprehensive and outdated program.

Respondents feel strongly that centers should strengthen their ties with business and industry through (1) advisory committees, (2) updating staff skills, (3) student placement after graduation, (4) student internships and work experience, and (5) donation of high quality equipment.

2. Relationships with the Community

Finding the right kind of business, industry and labor representatives is a challenge for center directors when looking for working groups who will not merely "rubber stamp" plans and activities.

Center directors are finding some interesting ways to become involved in their local communities beyond the Rotary, Lions and Kiwanis speaking circuit. Several centers have made arrangements for schools and civic groups and community organizations to hold occasional luncheon meetings at the center. Not only does this give food services students additional opportunities to learn new skills but many more persons see what their tax dollars are buying.

Some centers have had more success than others in working with nearby community colleges. Strong examples of coordinated programs are Kitsap, Sno-Isle and Yakima Valley. In some instances, industry has come directly to a skills center for contracted training services or will use center facilities to teach their own classes. Some skills centers have been reaching out to nontraditional groups such as Job Training Partnership Act.

One area all skills center directors would like to strengthen is work experience. Here again, staff time is required to arrange appropriate community placements.

There are, however, numerous examples of community involvement, such as a Sears outlet where students in a fashion merchandising class report for "class" two days a week.

B. Options to Consider

1. Revise and update materials that describe the state skills center approach, including the existing slide/tape production. Consider producing an annual report featuring skills center offerings and results for distribution to local business, industry and constituents.

2. Initiate a statewide effort to examine the relationship of vocational education and the "push for excellence," which in most instances has been interpreted as limited to adding more academic coursework. Explore other states' approaches to this issue, including the equivalent credit model.

3. Emphasize increased skills center planning and articulation with nearby postsecondary institutions, including shared personnel and facilities as well as advanced placement for skills center graduates.

4. Encourage local business and industry to provide loaned and donated equipment as part of their investment in a trained workforce.

5. Continue to provide innovative outreach opportunities for community residents to expand the skills center's role (e.g., short term classes for adults).

VII. FUNDING

A. Essential Features

The ways in which center funding is allocated and managed varies greatly from state to state. This is to be expected, since state systems of financing education are unique and idiosyncratic in their historical development and in the values and beliefs which have shaped them.

In reviewing programs in several states noted for having strong skills center programs, some similarities emerged in the funding issues they were addressing. These broad issues, which tend to be similar to those faced by the State of Washington, are:

- Maintaining sufficient stability of program and staffing to assure quick program delivery in an area of education which is both highly dynamic and totally different in its requirements from traditional secondary education

- Assuring that the administrators and counselors of the high schools from which skills center students are drawn do not have to cut back on other programs in order to offer their students the skills center as an option

- Maintaining the state-of-the art equipment which is crucial to skills center ability to deliver quality instruction

- Competing effectively with the private sector for the uniquely qualified staff who are essential to skills center operation

- Assuring that a sound system of transportation is available and adequately funded so that the center can effectively serve students from schools of widely varying distances from its operation

In approaching these issues, states with the most outstanding programs proceed with the belief that resolution is essential in offering a valuable program to students.

The Washington pattern of funding for skills centers is embedded in and consistent with the Washington State System of Full Funding which provides the support for elementary and secondary education in the state:

- Preliminary skills center feasibility and planning study costs are borne by the state upon application by a "coordinating" district on behalf of interested local districts.

- Costs for construction and initial equipment attached to the structure are shared by the state and the local districts, approximately 90 percent state funding and 10 percent local funding. Construction must meet state construction guidelines. Participating districts typically rely upon a bond issue for their share of initial construction and equipment costs.

- Operational costs borne by a host school district, acting as the agent for all participating districts and utilizing state support generated by the fulltime equivalent (FTE) pupil enrollment, are created by the actual hours students attend the center (900 hours equal one FTE student).

- Because skills center occupational training requires intensive student-teacher contact and costly materials, a funding lid ratio of one teacher to 16.67 students is prescribed in current legislation rather than 1:20 as in the regular school program. This is a way of allocating state funds, however, and in no manner represents a state requirement regarding how many students must be served in a classroom.

- While most Washington school districts offer at least six class periods a day, the state finance structure officially supports only five. Due to the three-credit block spent for center instruction, including "passing" time to and from the center, most skills centers claim students for three hours a day (.60 FTE) for state reimbursement purposes with two hours (.40 FTE) retained by the home high school. The majority of skills center students, however, are enrolled in three classes at their home school, leaving one class period "unfunded" at the present time.

- While the 16.67 funding unit raises the bulk of operational funds, this amount may or may not be sufficient to offer a comprehensive, high quality program. Other sources of revenue for a skills center may include:

  a. tuition payments for students enrolled from nearby school districts that are not official members of the consortium

  b. special grant funds for working with "categorized" groups (handicapped, JTPA)

  c. abatements (e.g., receipts from student services or products as in a food service laboratory or construction program, and special purpose training programs requested by local industries, etc.)

  d. student fees, if any

  e. allocation for summer school sessions using the same 16.67 formula

  f. prorata share of unfunded or excess costs billed to participating districts

States across the nation face challenges which are similar in operating strong skills center programs. The states included in the survey varied significantly in how they moved to meet them. The legal and political milieu surrounding school finance, as well as the strength of the belief that quality vocational education should be within reach of all students, appeared to be major factors in the approach used by any given state. Examples of cooperative programs along the following continua were reported:

From		To
School districts provide most funding	⟷	State supports entire program through line-item appropriation
No financial incentive for school districts to send students	⟷	No loss of funds by sending districts for students enrolled in skills center
No local taxing authority	⟷	Separate taxing district to help support center
Districts "buy" slots or pay tuition	⟷	No per-student charge-backs

Following is a more detailed analysis of the five issue areas outlined in the overview, drawing on the experience of other states to examine the experience of Washington and to generate options that might be considered in strengthening the overall system.

1. Maintaining Stability of Program

Almost all states which support the concept of multi-district vocational educational centers recognize that these centers do cost more to operate than either traditional academic or vocational programs. They also recognize that state support of these costs is essential to the fiscal stability of the centers.

Three models are commonly employed to deliver this support to centers:

- Center appropriations become a line item request for legislative action.
- Taxing districts are created so that centers are supported by the levy of a small uniform amount across the area to be served. A variation on this theme is to have intermediate educational districts operate centers.
- Centers receive FTE monies with the districts receiving full FTE amounts as well.

In states where funding is achieved by legislative action, a formula is used which may recognize certain types of excess cost and take anticipated enrollment into account. In Washington, enrollment fluctuations within a single year can leave programs without means to support staff who were placed under contract at the year's beginning. This is a significant weakness of the current Washington system.

Some states also address program stability by providing funding for core staff independent of enrollment. This approach is used in Idaho and New York. Although the definition of "core staff" varies considerably, states which use this approach do so in recognition of the fact that it provides a stabilizing element.

In Washington, statutes call for basic programs to be entirely state-supported. Regulations recognize that operating an area-wide facility requires additional funding which regular academic and vocational programs do not now receive. General education in Washington state is funded at 20.0 staff per 1,000 students or 1:20 FTE; secondary vocational programs at 1:18.30; and vocational skill centers at 1:16.67. Even so, full funding does not cover the entire cost of the skills center program. The revenue generated by this pattern in 1982-83 and center expenditures for that year are shown in the following table.

1982-84 Expenditures* and Revenue

Center	Expenditures		FTE		State Revenue/FTE		Cost Above State Apportionment/FTE**	
	1982-83	1983-84	1982-83	1983-84	1982-83	1983-84	1982-83	1983-84
Highline	843,843	896,626	284.00	293.40	2,430	2907	458	149
Sno-Isle	1,004,799	1,251,778	437.09	476.00	2,411	2832	-249	-202
Kitsap	849,976	862,877	295.40	294.60	2,365	2829	744	100
Yakima	818,105	852,109	356.02	313.40	2,344	2804	105	-85
Tri-City	533,347	818,283	268.12	224.80	2,170	2602	90	1038
Spokane	691,501	904,752	294.60	334.60	2,259	2705	88	4
Clark		583,157		220.40		2645		1

*Includes summer school

**Cost above state apportionment/FTE represents additional revenue that was generated locally to "make up" the difference between state funding provided and that actually expended in 1983-84 by the centers. In one case, there was enough "income" from sale of products and services to provide a "credit". In general, the "shortfall" of state revenue per FTE is large enough to present a potentially serious threat to a stable program if FTE were to fall significantly for even a short period of time. The combined effect makes system stability marginal.

2. Financial Incentives for Districts to Participate

In surveying eight states noted for strong skills center programs, NWREL found none which failed to provide some type of financial incentive to the schools from which skills center pupils are drawn. Several either continue to provide full state support to the sending district when students attend the skills center part of a day or provide partial support even when the student attends the skills center fulltime. For example:

- In Colorado, Illinois, Minnesota and Michigan, sending schools lose none of their state reimbursement for skills center students, provided the student is at the home campus for a specified minimum amount of time.

- In Ohio, where students typically attend the area center fulltime, the sending school still receives 25 percent of the state support, based on the administrative responsibilities (registration, recordkeeping, transcript review and diploma granting) which are retained by the sending school.

The dilemma faced by participating schools is real: while the area skills centers offer an important opportunity for many students, the fact that these students spend a substantial amount of time at the skills center does not reduce the need for the home school to offer a strong core program. Even though there is no significant effect on the number of courses or sections of courses which must be part of the core program, the funding pattern is such that revenues for support of the home high school program are reduced. In a large school, unless pupils happen to be drawn from only a very few course sections, the program needs would not change at all. In a small school, the situation may be even worse; many classes are single section and must be offered as long as the school is to be accredited.

In Washington, the loss of approximately 60 percent of the FTE represented by students participating in skills centers reduces the state support for programs without reducing their overall costs. The problem is particularly acute in districts with declining enrollments and is exacerbated by the fact that, while reimbursement is based on a five-period day, most districts actually operate for six. Since the large majority of students in skills centers (85 percent or more) are actually enrolled for six periods of instruction, the present system is hurting both programs.

3. Maintaining State-of-the Art Equipment

With changes in technology affecting all occupational areas today, employer advisory committees are quick to point out the need to replace outmoded equipment and equipment that becomes too costly to repair. States contacted in the survey approach annual equipment outlays in a variety of ways:

- Local skills center budgets include costs for equipment purchases and repair in their regular funding projections.

- Programs of different kinds are reimbursed by the state at different levels, depending on their equipment requirements.

- Federal vocational education funds are earmarked for equipment purchases up to a specified percentage.

- Funds levied locally are used.

- Some classes are held in community sites (local businesses, community colleges, high schools) using available resources at those locations.

Washington skills centers operate through a combination of these approaches. When a skills center is built, equipment costs are largely underwritten by the state for no more than five occupational fields. Subsequent purchases the next year will be covered for two new program areas. A maximum of one new program can be added annually in each center. Skills centers must apply for the funds which are generated federally.

Soliciting donation of equipment from the private sector is sometimes utilized by aggressive and creative skills center directors, as is joint use with a local community college (e.g., between the Sno-Isle Vocational Skills Center and Edmonds Community College in the area of Computer Aided Design). While these practices are to be both encouraged and applauded, they are unrealistic and risky as a basis for program planning and design. For example, while most firms are generous in what they offer to skills center programs, a common pattern is to donate equipment which is being replaced because it has been rendered obsolete by new lines. In the past this may not have been a particularly serious problem, since things changed more slowly and a large number of firms might have been satisfied to hire individuals trained on slightly older equipment. Increasingly, especially in the attractive high tech fields, this is simply not the case.

The extent to which centers are feeling the pressure of equipment needs is reflected by the fact that by far the biggest budget increases between 1982-83 and 1983-84 were for equipment.

Comparison of Two-Year Equipment Requirements

Center	Actual 1982-83 Expenditures	Actual 1983-84 Expenditures
Highline	$ 30,439	$ 57,620
Sno-Isle	45,733	77,112
Kitsap	58,521	48,260
Yakima	51,497	37,895
Tri-Cities	15,647	73,893
Spokane	4,149	22,686
Clark	*	2,534
Total	$205,986	$320,000

* Clark was under construction during this year

4. Competing Effectively for Staff

People are the major cost item in educational programs, and skills center programs are no exception. In those states where the state supports most or all operational costs for skills centers, a formula is often used to determine how many staff in various categories are allowed. Frequently, as in Washington, the state may assign a value per staff member and any cost beyond that must be made up by local districts.

When such systems are applied, skills centers suffer from the fact that most skills center staff are significantly different in training and experience from staff in regular secondary programs. Increasingly, skills centers need people for whom private industry, rather than public education, is the primary market for their skills. A recent study by Dr. Orville Nelson at the Center for Vocational, Technical and Adult Education in Wisconsin (October 1984 Voc Ed Journal) reports that a major problem facing area vocational schools is that teacher salaries need to be more competitive with business and industry.

States generally report a growing concern in this area, especially in the high technology fields where specialists are scarce and can command higher salaries.

The situation in Washington appears in the chart that follows:

1983-84 Average Salaries for Skills Centers vs. Vocational (Program 30) and General Certificated Staff (Program 00)

Center	Skills Center		Vocational		General	
		FTE		FTE		FTE
Highline	$24,724	(17.0)	$25,347	(40.3)	$26,683	(515)
Sno-Isle	24,800	(20.0)	29,849	(6.5)	26,985	(232)
Kitsap	28,346	(16.5)	27,658	(7.8)	27,211	(240)
Yakima	27,303	(17.5)	27,013	(20.6)	25,100	(394)
Tri-City	23,768	(12.6)	26,328	(11.6)	23,286	(425)
Spokane	24,409	(17.5)	26,914	(55.4)	23,988	(1026)
Clark	24,238	(10.0)	28,392	(17.9)	23,098	(409)

As the data show, the current scene is somewhat mixed. Four of the seven currently operating skills centers pay staff slightly more than the average for other certificated staff in the host district, while two pay slightly less. (In one case, reimbursement is based upon a different time base and hence comparisons are not valid.) In all but Kitsap, skills center staff are paid less than other secondary vocational education staff.

While there has been some loss of staff to higher paying private sector jobs, Washington center directors have not yet encountered the major problems in recruiting personnel which many other states have reported. Time and resources did not permit a more extensive analysis, such as comparing salaries for specific critical fields with other staff and with positions in the private sector to which skills center staff might reasonably aspire.

Center staff placement on the Legislative Evaluation Appraisal Program (LEAP) is related to the unique background necessary in these positions. Procedures of this program "undervalue" experience and training not directly related to the profession of teaching, and center staff will tend to be rated lower on the LEAP form at the same time that the competition with the private sector for their skills tend to cause districts to pay them higher average salaries. Over a period of time, this could become a disincentive to host districts.

Nearly 70 percent of the superintendents surveyed feel the staff mix is a significant cost factor that should be recognized by the state.

5. Transportation

The movement of students from their homes to the regular high school is funded by the state up to a specified percentage level. "Excess" busing costs are often a local matter. State-funded transportation of students from the home high school to a skills center is sometimes a different question, however. The survey found that some "feeder" school districts in other states operate twice-a-day service to and from the skills centers as a part of their regular transportation system. They budget for all students and receive reimbursement accordingly. Some programs provide no transportation for students who are on their own.

Distinctive variations were:

- Area skills centers contract with the local districts to provide transportation
- Some skills centers operate their own bus fleet
- Others split the cost of running buses with the participating districts
- Sending districts underwrite all costs

Washington skills centers rely entirely on the member districts to operate transportation services. Whatever excess costs are incurred are absorbed into the overall transportation budget of the districts. Students and parents often provide their own transportation, too. At least one skills center operates its own van/small bus to move students to and from satellite "laboratories"--e.g., a marine technology lab or forestry program. At least one participating district recently discussed eliminating bus transportation to the skills center as a cost-cutting measure. The overall pattern in Washington is one in which the unique costs of an area program are not recognized by the state funding system for educational transportation.

B. Options to Consider

In considering options for strengthening the system, it is important to evaluate each from several perspectives: the current context, with its strengths and weaknesses; the possible future context and how it might affect skills centers and the degree to which any given option requires major legislative or statutory changes in the Washington system.

1. The Current Context

Skills centers are still a relatively new network and are reasonably small, in terms of FTE enrollment relative to total state enrollment. One additional center is currently under development and at least two others are being discussed. No extensive expansion seems likely in the near future. Rather, concentration on stabilization of the existing network as an important aspect of secondary education in Washington seems to be the most pressing need. Within this context, the most significant current funding problem is produced by a leveling off or slight decline in enrollments. This is perceived by survey participants in Washington schools as a temporary phenomenon, with 20 percent predicting a significant increase within two years and 50 percent predicting a significant increase within six to ten years.

The current state approach to excess costs (1:16.67) results in current resource levels which appear to be marginally adequate for operation of high quality programs. In this situation, however, even small enrollment decreases can potentially be quite harmful to the overall program quality because of their fiscal impact on staff and program offerings. Program equipment, too, is a major factor in program quality, and the current system seems below the margin of adequacy in that regard.

It would appear, therefore, that first priority should be actions which provide stronger incentives to sending schools for student participation and actions which upgrade the centers' ability to equip their programs. For the immediate future, options requiring significant changes in the current system should not be considered. The following options are suggested:

1. Reinstate the interdistrict cooperative factor to allow sending districts to receive reimbursement for ongoing costs incurred by enabling students to attend an area center. Costs for such items as planning time, records maintenance, information sharing, transportation and counseling are increased by participation in skills centers programs. Reimbursement will help participating districts provide support for recruitment, communication and counseling which is needed to maintain enrollment stability and controlled growth. Computed on the basis of 3372 "total enrollment" x .25 weighting factor x 2360 (the average program 00 allocation) times .5 (based on 3 hours in program 00) this would result in an annual cost to the state of $994,740. Total enrollment in this case is derived by using the actual 1983-84 skills center FTE of 1989.48 ÷ .59 (average time spent in skills center programs).

2. Provide state funding for <u>replacement</u> of equipment separate from the funding available for new program start-up. Based on current estimates and a 10-year replacement schedule, the each-year cost to the state would average approximately $35,000 per center for an annual cost of $280,000.

3. Increase the allowable hours for students attending skills centers to six, rather than five per day, and allow the FTEs generated to be claimed either in program 00 (by the sending school) or in program 45 (the skills center) as students actually attend. This would provide more resources to maintain program effort in the sending school without loss to the skills centers. Presently, it is estimated that 85 percent of skills center students actually attend three hours at their home high school and three hours at the center. The estimated cost to the state would be $1,353,000.

4. Place the current funding differential (60/100) in legislation, rather than leaving it as a regulation only.

5. Provide state funding for a core local skills center staff, independent of FTE-based reimbursements (e.g., two certified staff for the administrative core to include job development and marketing functions and one classified to include records management functions).

2. The Future Context

It is beyond both the scope of this study and the capabilities of its authors to project the future in any fine-grained detail. There are, however, some indicators in the information gathered here that may provide clues. One indicator has already been mentioned--the perception of our nearly 350 respondents that student enrollment in skills centers will hold the line in the short-term future and will grow significantly over the next 10 years. Another indicator is the national concern, also expressed in Washington state, for attracting the type of staff skills centers will need to conduct programs at the cutting edge of the information age. A third is the expectation that more complex and technically difficult skills will need to be delivered, based on emerging trends in the nature of work.

A particular aspect of the future context to note is the extent to which applied learning experiences are beginning to be seen by some as critical for the hard sciences and mathematics. Some future-oriented planners see environments like those of the skills center as one mechanism through which these types of experiences could be efficiently delivered. The programs which this might generate would be substantially different from current programs and would have budget implications.

The future context would seem to require consideration, within the next three to five years, of options which will strengthen the center ability to provide even more students with ever higher quality programs staffed by increasingly better qualified and better paid people. Since the time frame here is slightly more forgiving, several additional options can reasonably be considered, some of which call for fundamental changes in the current system:

1. More adequate funding for vocational education in general and the skills centers in particular to perform an increasingly complex task. Changing the program 30 ratio to 1:16.67 and the skills centers to 1:15 would recognize the reality of higher costs of specialized vocational staff and materials as well as the growing need for curriculum and staff development which will support significantly changed programs.

2. Provide changes in the funding formula to recognize and capitalize on the value of the centers as providers of introductory vocational experiences for a much larger group of students who will attend for shorter-than-normal time blocks, thus increasing their awareness of emerging employment opportunities regardless of what academic program they may pursue.

3. As skills centers increase their service and their size, explore funding entirely through a separate line item in legislative appropriations. This would allow the system to expand more quickly and more directly in response to state level demands for specialized programs vital to economic development

4. Create taxing authority for the joint powers operating an area skills center to provide a minimum tax base for support of basic operations. This would make service more stable over time by providing a "guaranteed base" from which to plan services, thus increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the centers. Another approach would be to encourage local districts to allocate a portion of their levies to the skills center serving their area.

5. Require cooperating districts to guarantee purchase of a predetermined number of student slots each year; the centers to receive the revenue even if "slots" are not fully utilized. This would provide both a more stable base for program planning and an incentive for closer cooperation between the sending school and the skills centers.

6. Allow sending districts and centers alike to claim .75 FTE if a student spends at least half time in their institution. This would provide both centers and sending schools with a more nearly "full" funding for the programs they are actually delivering and provide greater financial incentive to counsel students into the most appropriate setting.

Summary

Obviously, not all the potential funding options have been included in this study. Just as clearly, it would be unnecessary and unwise to attempt to implement this entire range of options simultaneously. What is needed, however, is selection of short range approaches and continuing examination and planning for increasing the longer term viability of skills center programs.

SUMMARY OF OPTIONS

The alternatives outlined throughout this report are summarized in the section that follows. For details on how each set of options was derived, please refer to the appropriate section.

Policy and Planning

1. Develop a common guidebook for skills center directors and administrative councils, including but not limited to:

   a. Suggested policies and procedures (e.g., grading policies)
   b. Relevant state statutes and regulations
   c. Sample interdistrict agreements
   d. Suggested standards
   e. Suggested common data base system.

2. Give the administrative council's role greater emphasis as the center's policymaking body. Rotate the chair's responsibility among member districts annually to give participating superintendents closer familiarity with center operations.

3. Suggest that the center director be invited to attend participating district management team meetings.

4. Expand state technical assistance services to include support in information sharing, maintaining information bases, and arranging statewide skills center staff "networking" opportunities.

5. Encourage administrative councils to include skills centers in the accreditation self-study of participating high schools, perhaps using a simple checklist which would not bog down each center in additional paperwork or staff time.

Curriculum and Instruction

1. Continue summer school option for skills centers, emphasizing its value as an extension of the nine-month program, its value as a student initial training experience and its potential for providing short-term training.

2. Consider the addition of academic skills staff at skills centers as a mechanism for strengthening the tie between vocational subject matter and basic skills. Academic staff can also provide valuable help in remediation and tutoring.

3. Review the possibilities of utilizing skills centers for other specialty programs with limited enrollments but with obvious occupational merit (foreign languages, advanced mathematics, advanced science).

4. Implement a more flexible student day through earlier morning and later afternoon classes to accommodate tight student schedules. Make sure center offerings are clearly listed in participating high schools' master schedules and catalogs.

5. Maintain the three-hour-block timeframes for most students, but continue working to change curricula so that equivalent academic credit might be available in those programs where rigorous content has been identified by joint academic/vocational committees.

6. Emphasize the importance of student leadership opportunities in long-range local center planning and in annual staff performance reviews.

Student Services

1. Pursue state support for essential core student services staff to provide counseling and recordkeeping assistance, job placement networking, and outreach to local employers.

2. Provide for a more visible transition process for skills center "completers," including an exit interview and a career portfolio that includes a completed resume.

3. Expand services to special populations by utilizing Individualized Education Plan (IEP) resources through participating high schools.

Providing for Staff

1. Encourage skills center staff to take leaves of absences for skills update experiences (internships) in business and industry as part of an approved professional development plan.

2. Conduct annual statewide survey of skills center staff development needs.

3. Provide additional opportunities for group staff development before each school year begins.

4. Review current LEAP schedule and placement of private sector-qualified instructors to determine if this schedule accommodates competitive salaries for specialized personnel from business and industry.

5. Encourage participating districts to include the center directors in regular and/or special management team planning sessions.

6. Recommend future skills center directors to obtain vocational administrative and administrative certification as principals in recognition of their management of complex organizations.

Working with Key Publics

1. Revise and update materials that describe the state skills center approach, including the existing slide/tape production. Consider producing an annual report featuring skills center offerings and results for distribution to local business, industry and constituents.

2. Initiate a statewide effort to examine the relationship of vocational education and the "push for excellence," which in most instances has been interpreted as limited to adding more academic coursework. Explore other states' approaches to this issue, including the equivalent credit model.

3. Emphasize increased skills center planning and articulation with nearby postsecondary institutions, including shared personnel and facilities as well as advanced placement for skills center graduates.

4. Encourage local business and industry to provide loaned and donated equipment as part of their investment in a trained workforce.

5. Continue to provide innovative outreach opportunities for community residents to expand the skills center's role (e.g., short term classes for adults).

Funding: Current Context

1. Reinstate the interdistrict cooperative factor to allow sending districts to receive reimbursement for ongoing costs incurred by enabling students to attend an area center. Costs for such items as planning time, records maintenance, information sharing, transportation and counseling are increased by participation in skills centers programs. Reimbursement will help participating districts provide support for recruitment, communication and counseling which is needed to maintain enrollment stability and controlled growth. Computed on the basis of 3372 "total enrollment" x .25 weighting factor x 2360 (the average program 00 allocation) times .5 (based on 3 hours in program 00) this would result in an annual cost to the state of $994,740. Total enrollment in this case is derived by using the actual 1983-84 skills center FTE of 1989.48 ÷ .59 (average time spent in skills center programs).

2. Provide state funding for replacement of equipment separate from the funding available for new program start-up. Based on current estimates and a 10-year replacement schedule, the each-year cost to the state would average approximately $35,006 per center for an annual cost of $280,000.

3. Increase the allowable hours for students attending skills centers to six, rather than five per day, and allow the FTEs generated to be claimed either in program 00 (by the sending school) or in program 45 (the skills center) as students actually attend. This would provide more resources to maintain program effort in the sending school without loss to the skills centers. Presently, it is estimated that 85 percent of skills center students actually attend three hours at their home high school and three hours at the center. The estimated cost to the state would be $1,353,000.

4. Place the current funding differential (60/100) in legislation, rather than leaving it as a regulation only.

5. Provide state funding for a core local skills center staff, independent of FTE-based reimbursements (e.g., two certified staff for the administrative core to include job development and marketing functions and one classified to include records management functions).

Funding: Future Context

1. More adequate funding for vocational education in general and the skills centers in particular to perform an increasingly complex task. Changing the program 30 ratio to 1:16.67 and the skills centers to 1:15 would recognize the reality of higher costs of specialized vocational staff and materials as well as the growing need for curriculum and staff development which will support significantly changed programs.

2. Provide changes in the funding formula to recognize and capitalize on the value of the centers as providers of introductory vocational experiences for a much larger group of students who will attend for shorter than normal time blocks, thus increasing their awareness of emerging employment opportunities, regardless of what academic program they may pursue.

3. As skills centers increase their service and their size, explore funding entirely through a separate line item in legislative appropriations. This would allow the system to expand more quickly and more directly in response to state level demands for specialized programs vital to economic development.

4. Create taxing authority for the joint powers operating an area skills center to provide a minimum tax base for support of basic operations. This would make service more stable over time by providing a "guaranteed base" from which to plan services, thus increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the centers. Another approach would be to encourage local districts to allocate a portion of their levies to the skills center serving their area.

5. Require cooperating districts to guarantee purchase of a predetermined number of student slots each year; the centers to receive the revenue even if "slots" are not fully utilized. This would provide both a more stable base for program planning and an incentive for closer cooperation between the sending school and the skills centers.

6. Allow sending districts and centers alike to claim .75 FTE if a student spends at least half time in their institution. This would provide both centers and sending schools with a more nearly "full" funding for the programs they are actually delivering and provide greater financial incentive to counsel students into the most appropriate setting.

APPENDIX A

DISTRICTS PARTICIPATING IN WASHINGTON SKILLS CENTERS

1984-85

(Highline) Occupational Skills Center, Seattle
- Highline (host district)
- South Central
- Federal Way

Sno-Isle Vocational Skills Center, Everett
- Arlington
- Darrington
- Everett
- Granite Falls
- Lake Stevens
- Lakewood
- Marysville
- Monroe
- Snohomish
- Mukilteo (host district)
- South Whidbey

Kitsap Peninsula Vocational Skills Center, Bremerton
- Bremerton (host district)
- Central Kitsap
- Mason
- North Kitsap
- Peninsula
- South Kitsap

Yakima Valley Vocational Skills Center, Yakima
- Highland
- Moxee
- Naches
- Selah
- Toppenish
- Union Gap
- Wapato
- West Valley
- Yakima (host district)
- Zillah

Tri-City Area Vocational Skills Center, Kennewick

Columbia 400 (Burbank)
Finley
Kennewick (host district)
Kiona-Benton
Pasco
Richland

Spokane Area Vocational Skills Center, Spokane

Central Valley
Cheney
Deer Park
East Valley
Mead
Medical Lake
Spokane (host district)
West Valley

Clark County Vocational Skills Center, Vancouver

*Battle Ground
Camas
Evergreen (host district)
LaCenter
Ridgefield
Washougal
Woodland
*Parkrose (Oregon)

Thurston County Skills Center, Tumwater

North Thurston
Olympia
Shelton
Tenino
Tumwater (host district)
Yelm

APPENDIX B

1984-85 Skills Center Offerings

	Clark	Kitsap	Occup. Skills Ctr	Sno-Isle	Spokane	Tri-City	Yakima
Air Conditioning		x					
Animal Care				x			
Auto Body Repair		x			x	x	x
Auto Mechanics and Maintenance	x	x		x	x	x	x
Auto Parts Distribution					x		
Aviation Mechanics							x
Broadcasting/Radio-TV Production					x	x	x
Cashier/Checker			x			x	x
Commercial Art					x		
Computer Programming							x
Computer Technology/DP/Maintenance	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Construction Trades		x	x	x			x
Cosmetology		x			x	x	x
Data Entry					x		
Dental Assisting	x		x	x	x		x
Dept Store/Fashion Merchandising		x		x			
Diesel/Heavy Equipment Mechanics	x			x			
Electronics	x	x		x	x		x
Engineering Aide/Drafting					x		
English as a Second Language		x					
Fashion Design/Power Sewing		x					
Fashion Marketing	x						
Food Occupations	x	x	x	x	x	x	

APPENDIX B

1984-85 Skills Center Offerings

	Clark	Kitsap	Occup. Skills Ctr	Sno-Isle	Spokane	Tri-City	Yakima
Forestry		x					
Graphics/Printing					x	x	x
Industrial Mechanics						x	
Landscape Design, Construction, Maintenance				x			
Dental/Medical Clerical			x			x	
Legal/Medical Secretary		x		x			x
Office Occupations					x		
Machine Trades				x	x		
Marine Engine Maintenance		x	x				
Marine Technology			x				
Medical Careers/Nursing Assisting	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Production Plastics			x	x			
Small Gas Engines						x	
Teen Parent						x	
Visual Communications			x				
Warehousing/Inventory				x			
Welding		x		x	x	x	x
Word Processing	x			x		x	

APPENDIX C

SURVEY FINDINGS

The following pages provide a summary of the 306 responses to a questionnaire sent to the following persons who are "key actors" in districts that were participating in Washington's seven skills centers during school year 1983-84.

All responses shown are in percentages except for questions 6 and 7 which represent actual numbers of persons who checked a particular item.

Not included here are many handwritten responses to open-ended questions. Those may be requested directly from Dr. Larry McClure at Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

WASHINGTON STATE
AREA VOCATIONAL SKILLS CENTERS:

A STUDY OF PRESENT AND FUTURE TRENDS

Personal Information

Position: Superintendent 35 Principal 47 Counselor 81 Teacher 143

1. Students consider the Skills Center to be an integral part of the home high school. (e.g., students feel the Center is an important option their school offers)

Percent

Circle One:	1 Strongly Agree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Disagree
Superintendent	37	37	20	6	0
Principal	21	34	26	16	4
Counselor	32	32	26	10	0
Teacher	14	22	35	23	6

2. Staff at the home high school consider the Skills Center to be part of "their" program. (e.g., faculty tell visitors about course offerings at the Center)

Circle One:	1 Strongly Agree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Disagree
Superintendent	14	29	34	20	3
Principal	4	33	33	24	4
Counselor	4	23	36	33	5
Teacher	6	15	34	24	21

4. How well are Center programs articulated:

	Very Poorly 1	2	3	4	Very Well 5
(a) with home school counselors?					
Superintendent	0	6	21	65	9
Principal	2	2	15	55	26
Counselor	1	1	12	44	41
Teacher	7	19	35	28	12

4. How well are Center programs articulated:

	Very Poorly				Very Well
(b) with post-secondary institutions?	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	3	23	43	27	3
Principal	3	16	58	23	0
Counselor	2	11	55	31	9
Teacher	9	28	39	23	2
(c) with existing vocational program?	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	0	3	36	49	12
Principal	5	9	36	43	7
Counselor	0	19	38	34	10
Teacher	18	21	34	25	2
(d) with academic coursework?	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	3	15	15	20	0
Principal	4	20	49	24	2
Counselor	4	26	34	27	9
Teacher	23	29	37	9	3

6. How does the Center affect ongoing vocational offerings in your school/district? Check <u>all</u> that apply:

	Actual Number			
	Sup't	Prin.	Couns.	Teacher
_____ No effect	6	6	9	20
_____ All course enrollments up	5	5	1	6
_____ Youth organizations weakened		3	4	24
_____ Youth organizations strengthened	3		3	9
_____ "Home" vocational programs lose enrollment	13	22	44	84
_____ Provides more options for kids	30	45	77	97
_____ Less variety available now in "home" vocational programs	8	9	17	38
_____ Other (please describe)	1	1	8	9

7. How is Center enrollment affected by increased graduation requirements? Check all that apply.

	Sup't	Prin.	Couns.	Teacher
_____ No effect	6	7	12	10
_____ Students feel time pressure	18	28	44	65
_____ Some students want to attend but cannot	24	24	64	91
_____ High achievers are not selecting Center offerings in lieu of academics	23	35	67	88
_____ More options are needed to accommodate students not succeeding now	7	8	27	37
_____ More students see college as a pathway to success	10	5	30	29
_____ Students are less concerned about job skills	4	3	8	20
_____ Other (please describe)	1		3	7

8. What is your best guess about student enrollment in your Skills Center?

	20% Decrease		Hold the Line		20% Increase
	1	2	3	4	5
In the next 2 years					
Superintendent	3	6	71	20	0
Principal	4	15	57	22	10
Counselor	5	14	56	20	5
Teacher	13	19	51	13	4
In the next 3-5 years					
Superintendent	0	11	37	49	3
Principal	4	11	40	38	7
Counselor	5	17	34	35	9
Teacher	8	26	37	25	5
In the next 6-10 years					
Superintendent	3	3	31	37	26
Principal	3	7	33	43	14
Counselor	4	10	35	31	20
Teacher	14	13	30	22	20

9. What might be the impact on enrollments <u>at the Center</u> during the regular school year if the following options were implemented?

	Would Be Negative Factor		Mixed Impact	Would be Positive Factor	
	1	2	3	4	5
(a) Expanded summer school at Skills Center					
Superintendent	0	3	23	83	11
Principal	0	11	25	48	16
Counselor	5	1	19	44	31
Teacher	6	4	37	37	17
(b) Extended day for Skills Center classes	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	3	0	40	43	14
Principal	9	13	24	38	16
Counselor	11	16	26	34	13
Teacher	10	12	31	36	11
(c) Alternating semesters at Skills Center	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	19	2	63	10	6
Principal	12	17	57	12	2
Counselor	16	21	43	19	2
Teacher	6	19	46	22	8
(d) 7 or 8 period schedule at home high schools	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	15	15	24	27	18
Principal	22	14	21	14	21
Counselor	24	9	28	28	11
Teacher	26	14	28	24	8

10. How important is it for the Center to have the following kinds of involvement with business, industry, labor and government?

	Not an Important Need				Very Important Need
Advisory committees	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	0	0	0	31	12
Principal	0	0	4	23	72
Counselor	0	1	3	42	54
Teacher	0	3	10	25	62
Student work experience	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	0	0	18	50	32
Principal	2	2	15	52	28
Counselor	0	1	10	51	38
Teacher	1	3	13	38	45
Structured internships	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	0	0	17	11	19
Principal	7	4	19	54	16
Counselor	1	1	19	43	35
Teacher	0	3	23	46	27
Staff skills updating	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	0	0	0	54	46
Principal	0	0	9	43	49
Counselor	0	0	14	38	48
Teacher	0	1	9	30	59
Volunteers in classroom	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	6	9	46	24	15
Principal	9	17	48	22	4
Counselor	6	15	39	28	12
Teacher	0	14	38	37	12
Shared personnel	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	6	6	42	36	9
Principal	7	7	52	25	9
Counselor	1	13	39	34	13
Teacher	2	14	45	26	13

Classes at industry sites	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	22	6	42	36	9
Principal	7	7	52	25	9
Counselor	1	13	39	34	13
Teacher	2	14	45	26	13
Student placement after program completion	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Superintendent	0	11	26	46	17
Principal	2	6	21	60	11
Counselor	1	4	26	53	16
Teacher	1	1	32	41	24
Donated, high quality equipment	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Superintendent	0	3	6	43	49
Principal	0	2	13	26	60
Counselor	0	0	1	44	55
Teacher	2	0	11	47	40
Speakers in classroom	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Superintendent	0	3	11	43	43
Principal	0	2	22	40	37
Counselor	0	1	9	44	46
Teacher	0	1	12	38	47
Other: _____					
Superintendent	0	0	34	37	29
Principal	2	0	44	38	16
Counselor	3	4	23	46	25
Teacher	0	2	23	42	34

11. How important are the following ancillary services for a Skills Center?

	Not Important				Very Important
Personal counseling	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	6	14	14	14	23
Principal	2	15	26	34	23
Counselor	1	11	22	41	25
Teacher	4	12	19	35	31

School nurse/health services	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	14	23	51	11	0
Principal	13	23	38	23	2
Counselor	5	14	51	25	5
Teacher	9	20	6	30	7
Special education	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	6	14	34	31	14
Principal	15	4	28	34	19
Counselor	1	10	28	39	22
Teacher	8	17	35	29	11
Substance abuse program	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	9	29	37	14	11
Principal	15	15	33	30	7
Counselor	5	21	40	18	16
Teacher	10	18	36	26	11
Social/family counseling	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	15	32	38	15	0
Principal	19	21	40	19	0
Counselor	8	26	37	24	5
Teacher	11	24	38	20	7
Job placement services	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	3	0	6	43	49
Principal	0	0	2	33	65
Counselor	0	0	1	36	63
Teacher	0	0	7	30	61
Occupational information	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	0	0	6	37	57
Principal	0	0	2	44	54
Counselor	0	0	4	26	71
Teacher	0	0	6	23	70
Library service	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	6	17	46	20	11
Principal	2	11	40	37	11
Counselor	4	21	41	22	13
Teacher	2	14	38	31	15

Field trip transportation	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	0	11	26	40	23
Principal	4	17	23	30	26
Counselor	0	4	32	29	35
Teacher	2	6	19	41	33

Other: _____	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	0	0	0	0	100
Principal	0	0	100	0	0
Counselor	0	0	50	50	0
Teacher	0	11	11	11	67

12. From your vantage point, what is the general caliber of instructors teaching at the Center as compared to most secondary vocational programs?

	Below Average in Skill Ability				Above Average in Skill Ability
	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	0	3	24	67	6
Principal	0	9	24	56	11
Counselor	0	0	18	68	14
Teacher	1	4	39	46	11

13. From your understanding, how adequate is the overall training equipment at the Center?

	Needs Updating or Replacement		Adequate in Most Areas		Well-Equipped
	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	0	6	17	40	37
Principal	2	0	4	44	49
Counselor	0	0	7	43	51
Teacher	2	5	18	37	38

For superintendents only:

I am in a "host" school district ____ or participating school district ___
(The host district is the location of the Center; participating districts send students under an interagency agreement or on a tuition basis.)

Superintendent	17	83
Principal	20	78
Counselor	28	71
Teacher	45	55

3. What criteria should be most important when Center policymakers determine which programs to add or delete? (Check the three most important)

	Sup't	Princ	Couns	Teacher
_____ Labor market demand locally	25	39	71	112
_____ Labor market demand nationally	16	14	27	46
_____ Student interest	24	30	27	69
_____ Quality of instructor(s)	7	14	26	48
_____ Quality of equipment	0	3	9	21
_____ Availability of space	1	1	5	10
_____ Community support	0	7	11	33
_____ Advisory committee recommendations	22	28	34	63
_____ Costs of the program	12	8	11	29

1. How long have you been on your Center's Administration Council?
   Average = 4 Years

2. Has the administration council structure been satisfactory?

   Yes 91% No 9%

3. Do you feel you have the right amount of "voice" in setting policy and program operation guidelines?

   Yes 97% No 3%

4. Do you have any estimate of the costs for providing transportation to and from the Skills Center?

   Yes 69% No 31%

5. Do you have any estimate of the costs to update training equipment at the Center?

   Yes 21% No 78%

6. Given the unique personnel required to teach in specialized vocational fields, is the staff mix at the Center (training and experience level) a significant cost factor that needs to be recognized by the state?

   Yes 68% No 78%

7. To the best of your knowledge, are Skills Center "overhead" costs being adequately recovered under existing financial arrangements?

   Yes 79% No 21%

8a. Should there be statewide guidelines for determining the amount to charge for students coming from districts outside the original consortium.

   Yes 31% No 69%

8b. Should there be statewide guidelines for determining "buy in" costs for districts that might wish to join the the consortium?

   Yes 37% No 53%

8c. Should there be statewide guidelines for determining transportation costs for moving students to/from the Center to/from any satellite learning sites?

   Yes 67% No 33%

For principals only:

1. Have you been a part of any Center planning or advisory activities?
   Yes _____ No _____
   If yes, what kinds?

2. Would you want to have more input in planning Center programs and other matters? Yes _____ No _____
   Please provide examples:

3. How many miles is it from your high school to your Center? _____

4. Please describe any alternative or supplementary state or local funding arrangements you would recommend to provide continued strong area vocational centers?